FUNDAMENTALS OF SIKHISM

Compiled by
S. G. VENKATARAMANAN

ADYAR

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"You must feel perfect tolerance for all, and a hearty interest in the beliefs of those of another religion, just as much as in your own. For their religion is a path to the highest, just as yours is. And to help all, you must understand all."

At the Feet of the Master, p. 53 (Miniature Edition)

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CONTENTS

	PAGE
Introduction	ix
Life of Guru Nanak	1
Teachings of the Founder (alphabetically arranged)	7

PRAYER

O LORD, grant to the Sikhs the gift of true teaching, the gift of loyalty, the gift of faith, the gift of heroic sacrifice, the gift of the Name—bathing in the holy tank of nectar,—the power to read, to contemplate and understand the Guru's Holy Book; all of you say: Glorious is the Guru. (*The Gospel of the Guru Granth Sahib*, by Duncan Greenlees, M.A., (Oxon) based on a new translation of the *Japji* and many portions of the *Guru-Granth* of the Sikhs, referred to hereafter as "D.G.").

INTRODUCTION

Most people in thinking of the Sikh think of a gallant warrior, of a splendid fighter. But we shall err very seriously if we look on him, we, who are students of religion, as only, or even fundamentally, a fighter. That came by the pressure of circumstances, by the pressure of his environment; but the movement itself, in its lasting character, is fundamentally a religious movement. It is a movement which grew up in the midst of Hinduism, having in the mind of its great Founder, Guru Nanak, the idea of joining together the Hindus and Musalmans in one league of love to God and service to man. The thought of Guru Nanak—as we find it expressed not only in his words, but far more in his life—was to join together these warring elements of the Indian people on a platform that both could accept.

When the world is in trouble it prays sincerely, the True One listens with attention, and in the kindness of His nature grants consolation. . . . Among a crore of souls very few are God's servants; all the rest are worldly folk.

(D. G.)

Guru Nanak sought to find the grain, and in so doing threw aside, to a large extent, the husk; he strove to lead men to see the reality of religion, the life of religion, the essence of religion, and to see that life and essence in love to God and the Guru, in love to men as children of the one God. You may almost sum up in that phrase the very essence of Sikhism.

* * * *

Is there anything in it (Sikhism) which can serve but to bind together, to draw hearts close each to each, to bind men together in love? When you think of Guru Nanak, think of one of those great Prophets of peace, who, from supreme love to God, would draw the blessed fruit of love to men; and then you will see that the Sikh brothers are helpers in the building up of the one nation out of India with no quarrel against any, with no hatred against any, with no strife to divide them from any other faith.[1]

* * * *

[1] From *Seven Great Religions* by Annie Besant. Referred to hereafter as 'A. B.'

LIFE OF GURU NANAK

One morning after his bath Nanak saw God who gave him a cup of nectar with the blessing "I am with you; I have made happy both you and those who take your name. Go and repeat My Name and cause others to do so too. Practise repeating My Name, charities and bathings, worship and contemplation: I have given you this cup of nectar as a proof of my regard for you."

I (Guru Nanak) see no friend but Thee; Thine is my soul, all the body Thine, I am Thy slave, the dust of Thy servant's feet. . . . I am nothing at all; He alone Is, He is the One in the Beginning and the End.

The mortal round world was created like a house of sand; all that is seen must perish like the shadow of a cloud, so one should think continually of the Unseen.

(D. G.)

(The following quotations are from A. B.)

The story of his childhood is not eventful, but it is very pathetic and very quaint. Quaint in this way, that he was born in a family of good people, of the commonest quality, like an eagle in the nest of a sparrow, and the sparrows did not understand the eagle, and they could not make out what manner of creature this was. Quiet, reserved, silent, wandering away to meditate when other boys would be at play; what strange child this is, who will not learn as other boys learn, who will not play as other boys play, who when he goes to his teacher wants to know the mystic meaning of the letters, and angers the Pandit by asking questions that the Pandit—good man—cannot answer? Always coming athwart his surroundings because he must know what is within, he cannot be satisfied with what is without. And there is nothing more troublesome to the common place man or woman than to be pressed with questions as to realities, when he finds himself to be quite comfortable on the safe cushions of formulæ; and so Nanak, in his childhood, is a great trial to his father. Surely he must be

mad; he is sitting for hours meditating and taking no food; he must be having fever. They bring a doctor to see him. Nanak asks the doctor whether he could cure the diseases of his soul. What kind of patient is this who treats the physician in this manner? Or take him when the ceremony of the sacred thread is to be performed. The story is so characteristic that I will give it to you, and I ought to say here that for all the quotations I am making, I am depending upon my Sikh friends, who have been good enough to translate them for me from their own books, so that I may have ground to go on which is sure.

"When everything was ready and the Pandit (the family priest) was to invest him with it, Nanak turned round and enquired: 'Tell me, Panditji, of what use is this thread? What are the duties of the man who is invested with it? Why is it necessary to put it on?'

"'I do not know', replied the Purohit, but it is ordained in the Sastras, and we must follow our forefathers'.

"'From the cotton of compassion spin out the thread of love; make the knots of abstinence and truth; let your mind put on this

thread; it is not broken, or soiled, nor burned, nor lost. Praised be they who have put this on,' said Nanak.

"'I cannot put it on,' said Nanak, 'and I will advise you also to think more about the essence of things than the form. Only by true conviction one gains respect, and by praising God and by living truthfully one reaches perfection'."

* * * *

He begins his wanderings. He goes wandering about, singing with a musician, and a friend who follows him, Mardana and Bala, and he comes to a village where he needs food. There is a poor man, Lalu, a carpenter, a man of pure life, who welcomes the wandering Sannyasi, gives him his own bed, brings him warm food, and Nanak eats. Next day a rich banker in the town gives a great feast to Brahmanas, and invites Nanak to come and eat with them. Nanak goes, but he will not take the food. Says the host: "Why don't you take my food?"

"Because," said Nanak, "your food is not pure, for you have cooked the food for

self-glorification; it is a tamasic gift and therefore impure."

"You call my food impure while that of the low caste Lalu is pure? How is that?" asked Rai Bhag contemptuously.

"You treat your guests irreverently and contemptuously," said Nanak, "that shows your tamasic aims. I ate food cooked by Lalu for it was cooked with love and brought with reverence, with no desire for repayment. You must learn a lesson from humble Lalu. Your food is full of blood."

"What proof have you that my food is impure," demanded Rai Bhag angrily.

Nanak took Rai Bhag's food in one hand while in the other he took the food cooked by Lalu, and, as he pressed each, from Rai Bhag's food oozed out drops of blood while from that of Lalu oozed out milk.

Such was the way in which Guru Nanak taught the teaching ever bearing on reality and exposing show. Was he a Hindu? Was he a Musalman? Men quarrel as to what he was, for he was above distinctions of outer creed and he loved all men and called himself nothing. When he came to die after seventy

years of noble life and priceless teaching, his disciples disputed as to what faith he really belonged; should he be burned as a Hindu, or should he be buried as a Musalman? And as they disputed, one lifted the sheet over the corpse, and the body had disappeared, and he was neither burned nor buried.

TEACHINGS OF THE FOUNDER

(The following quotations are from D.G.)

Asura (Demon)

He who does evil deeds in this world,
Men call him an Asura (demon).

Bliss

In thy own home and palace find innate
bliss;
(thus) thou again shalt not return.

Company of Good Men

Wherever a devotee may go that place is beautiful; the company of the good man is Heaven, for God is the companion of devotees and the devotees adorn His court; there always . . . the devotees abide sustained by hymns; in the assemblage of the righteous there is bliss and rest.

Impurity evades the company of good people, and the supreme becomes their companion; God the King meets that person who has entered the presence of the righteous. The Holy Lord dwells on the tongue of a good man, . . . God shines forth on the Saint's brow.

Control

Keep the ten organs under control,
Then in his self the light shall shine forth.

Death

When God sends a man he comes into the world, he goes when recalled; leaving in the world his raiment (body) and pleasant beauty, he must go; he came naked, and naked he will go.

Deva (Angel)

The man who performs good actions
He is called a Deva (in this) world.

Devotion

Bhakti to God and also to the Guru, the Teacher, for the very name Sikh comes from

the word Sishya, disciple, and this idea of love to God and to the Teacher is the very basis and the very root of Sikhism. It is a movement, then, primarily of devotion. In its philosophy it is Hindu, but as a movement it is reformatory in its nature, striving against the formalism of the time, against the ceremonialism of the time, in order to find life which lay below the form, the essence of the truth which had inspired the ceremonies.

Without practising virtue, devotion is not possible.

Enmity

Keep no feeling of enmity for anyone; God is contained in every bosom, and on the head of the one who stirs up enmity against the man who has no enmity all the world's sin falls while he looks equally on foe and friend.

Grace

Self-control is the smithy, Patience the smith, understanding the anvil, wisdom the tools; the Fear (of God) is the bellows, burning Austerity the fire, and Love the crucible

wherein you melt the nectar—in (this) true Mint the Guru's Word can be coined, and this is the work of those on whom falls the Grace of His glance. Nanak, from grace upon grace comes bliss.

Guru

One path and one door—the Guru, the ladder to one's own home. Without the true Guru, the path is not found; no one has ever found it by pleasing himself. Without a Guru no one has obtained God, for all his talking; it is he who shows the way and fixes true devotion in the pupil.

O Nanak! know that to be the true Guru who unites (thee) with all, my dear.

Make (Divine) knowledge thy Guru, and teach thyself.

Karma

The Master (God) seated in judgment with His book, will call for the reckoning; of every moment He will take an account, the soul will get bad and good (returns); what she has

earned here, that she must receive yonder, each must get the very same bad and good that she herself has done. In the next world no authority avails, everyone fares according to his deeds; he may have done his own will to his heart's content down here, but in the future he must walk on the narrow road, and there he is judged just exactly according to the work he has done.

Man repeats the fruits of acts performed in the past birth; the happiness and woe Thou givest to every individual is just, O God! As he made a sowing in the past life, so he reaps now; Impute no blame to anyone, my brother, the blame belongs to your own Karma; say " what I have done, that I have suffered now! I give no blame to another person."

On Karma, the teaching is very clear:
Soweth himself, eateth himself.

Light

Thousands are Thy eyes; Nay! Nay!
Thou hast none;
Thousands are Thy forms; Nay! Nay!
Thou hast none;

Thousands are Thy holy feet; Nay! Nay!
Thou hast none;
Thou art without nostril (lit. sense of
smell) yet Thou hast a thousand nos-
trils;
This wondrous working of Thine be-
wilders (us),
In everthing, O Glory! is Thy Light.

Love for the Name

What is the use of bathing in holy waters if the filth of pride remains in the heart? He who feels no love for the Name in (his) heart will go to Hell if he performs crores of ceremonies.

Think thou on the great qualities of the
true Name at the ambrosial time
(morning).

Obedience

By obedience (keeping God's commandments after careful consideration of what they are), intelligence and clear thought arise in the mind, by obedience an awareness of all

the worlds, by obedience one suffers no calamities, by obedience one does not go in Death's company—so unconditioned is the Name, as anyone knows who looks carefully into his heart.

Renunciation

Of the things to be renounced, the most to be renounced are lust, hatred and avarice.

Hear thou! meditating on Hari's name do charity to all.

Supreme

First as to the Supreme, " Thou art I, I am Thou! Of what kind is the difference? " " In all the One dwells, the One is contained." " He Himself is One, and He Himself is many. He does not die nor perish. He neither comes nor goes. Nanak says that He is always contained in all."

He Himself, the Formless (and) the Form; That One without qualities and with qualities; One alone is spoken of, O Nanak, That One alone is many.

His greatness the Veda doth not know;
Brahma knoweth not His mystery;
Avataras know not His limit;
The Supreme Lord, Parabrahm, is boundless.

Unseen

The mortal round world was created like a house of sand; all that is seen must perish like the shadow of cloud, so one should think continually of the Unseen.

Worship

God never forgets the one who feels the love of God in his heart, and whoever repeats the Name of God in his heart and mind. Night and day he remains spontaneously immersed in love and worships the Name of God in his heart.

One day I was going to worship God in a temple, but the Guru explained that God is in my very heart.

And then for worship; every Hindu knows the Arati and the way in which light, and

one thing after another, are offered to the image of the worshipped God. Guru Nanak deprecates the use of images in worship, and in his own Arati offers the whole universe in worship of Brahm, the Supreme.

Yoga

Yoga is not mere talks, but the Yogi can be called the one who looks upon all equally with one regard; yoga is not going out to tombs and burning grounds, yoga is not the adopting of postures; yoga is not roaming in foreign lands, nor is yoga bathing in holy waters; remaining unspotted amidst impurity, thus is contact with yoga gained.